DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 022 772 TE 000 682

By- Isaacs, Sallie
FROM LANGUAGE TO LINGUISTIC CRITICISM.
Pub Date Jan 68
Note- 6p.
Journal Cit- English Journal; v57 n1 p47-51 Jan 1968
EDRS Price MF- $0.25 HC- $0.32
Descriptors- GRAMMAR, INTONATION, *LANGUAGE, LINGUISTIC PATTERNS, *LINGUISTICS, *LITERARY ANALYSIS, LITERATURE, *POETRY, *SHORT STORIES, STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS, SYNTAX, TAGMEMIC ANALYSIS

Linguistic criticism not only shows students the usefulness of grammar but also improves their comprehension of literature. For instance, a study of stress, pitch, and juncture in E. E. Cummings' "anyone lived in a pretty how town" adds meaning to the poem. Also helpful is an analysis of Cummings' tagmemic method of substitution slot-filling--use of verbs in noun slots and use of parallelism with the morpheme "by." An examination of D. H. Lawrence's short story, "The Blind Man," shows a contrast of grammatical patterns and literary moods between the second and fourth paragraphs. The conjunction "and" is used 10 times in the second paragraph to create a sense of the continuousness of joy. In contrast, "and" is used only twice in the fourth paragraph, but much embedding of kernel sentences that doubles back to emphasize, redefine, or modify reveals a sense of depression and regression. An analysis of the dialog in this story shows that Isabel's speech--replete with questions, negative morphemes, and the conjunction "but"--indicates her hesitation, indecision, and insecurity. Similarly, the speeches of Maurice and Bertie, showing constant use of the question transform, reveal their insecurity. This linguistic analysis, therefore, makes students more aware of the fusion of form and meaning, and points out the integral part that language plays in their lives. (JS)

ED022772
TE 000 682

ENGLISH JOURNAL

The Official Journal of the Secondary Section of
National Council of Teachers of English

Editor: RICHARD S. ALM
University of Hawaii

Volume 57 | January 1968 | Number 1

Who Is Afraid of Godot?	17	*George Smith* and *Gay Sauer*
Explication (Verse)	20	*Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.*
In Defense of Albee	21	*Carolyn E. Johnson*
Red Badge Revisited	24	*Gaston Pelletier*
Hamlet and Holden	26	*Clinton W. Trowbridge*
A Novel for High School Seniors: Hal Borland's *When the Legends Die*	30	*Carl A. Adkins*
Involving Students in a Humanities Class	34	*Richard E. Bamberger*
Smorgasbord (Verse)	38	*Gene Schoenberg*
On Frost's "The Wood-Pile"	39	*Robert Narveson*
Intensifying the Literary Experience Through Role Playing	41	*Paul T. McCalib*
Thoughts After the Accidental Death of a Young Girl (Verse)	46	*David Burmester*
From Language to Linguistic Criticism	47	*Sallie Isaacs*
The Case for Freedom in Composition and Literature	52	*Bryant Fillion*
Teaching Interpretive Expository Writing	59	*Marie Plotka* and *Arnold Lazarus*
Needed: Sequences in Composition	69	*Clarence W. Hach*
How Not To Assign "What-Did-You-Do-Last-Summer": A Cumulative Course in Writing Personal Narratives	79	*Fred E. H. Schroeder*
Composition: Teaching as Obstacle	85	*Stanley Stewart*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

From Language to Linguistic Criticism

Sallie Isaacs

Department of English
Edwardsville High School
Edwardsville, Illinois

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sallie Isaacs and National Council of Teachers of English TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

"WHY do I have to study *grammar?* Gosh, Miss Smith, we don't *do* anything with it!"

How many of us have heard this common complaint, or one similar to it? I suspect too many of us, and yet perhaps the students are justified. As adults we often become embittered about college professors who devote their time and our energy on subject matter that we as students consider useless. Surely our students guard their time as zealously as we do. And is there any other subject matter that our students rebel against more than grammar? I seriously doubt it.

There is a way, however, that we can prove the usefulness of grammar, and in the process improve our students' comprehension of literature. This method, linking linguistics to literary criticism, is called *linguistic criticism*, a term that simply means using grammar to explicate literature. Certainly we would not attempt to examine a lengthy literary work, but a passage or a poem, such as paragraphs from Thoreau's *Walden*, an E. B. White essay, a Mark Twain short story; or dialogue from such drama as *Trifles*, *Antigone*, or *Romeo and Juliet*; or such poems as Emily Dickinson's "I Like to See It Lap the Miles," Karl Shapiro's "Auto Wreck," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," or Robert Frost's "Out, Out—."

We can begin this process after our students have read a poem such as E. E. Cummings' "anyone lived in a pretty how town." After the students discuss the surface meaning of the poem, we must then lead them into a close linguistic analysis that will add meaning to the poem.

A first activity would be to have the students mark the poem for stress, pitch, and juncture. In this particular poem, stress is especially important, and the students soon recognize the shift in meaning when stress is moved.

Next we can provide an analysis of Cummings' tagmemic method of substitution slot-filling, a type of "organized violence done to language." His most effective substitution is his device of dropping verbs into noun slots:

. . . sang his *didn't* and danced his *did* . . .
. . . sowed their *isn't* . . .
. . . went their *came* . . . .

When students are asked to take the

verbs out and put nouns back into these slots, they understand not only what Cummings is saying but why the use of verbs is more effective. By using words of action where often abstract words occupy a position, the poet has added more meaning, even when the substituted words denote negative sterility in life, as in "sowed their isn't," and continued negative existence after death, "went their came." Some students like to substitute their own verbs in the noun slots, keeping the poet's theme and mood.

Also important in slot-filling is Cummings' use of parallelism with the morpheme "by." Instead of the expected use of "two by two," he substitutes the unexpected, like "bird by snow." He uses this parallelism to show the polarities and zeniths of life, of love, and of eternity with "when by now," "tree by leaf," "stir by still," "earth by April," "wish by spirit," and "if by yes." Each of these parallelisms merits study, but one will have to serve the purpose of this paper. "If" does not pertain to "anyone" and "no one," as their response to life has not reflected a conditional relationship; rather their response to life has been an unhestitating "yes." They will continue life together because their exuberant response to life while on earth will bring them together in eternity; they will dream their sleep.[1]

Students will find it stimulating to pretend that they are the poet Cummings and make editorial substitutions in the poem. Presented the _____ by _____ pattern, the students supply their own parallelisms, once again maintaining the poet's theme and mood. Also, they must be ready to explain their new patterns. One of my students offered "few by many," explaining that there are few anyone's in this world but many someone's.

Although the tagmemic technique is perhaps predominant, this one method does not by any means exhaust the possibilities for linguistic criticism of this one short poem, and a closer and deeper study would certainly weld form and content even more. In fact, grammar is essential in unlocking the meaning of this particular poem. As we use linguistics to unlock what might seem the juxtaposition of nothing by nothing, we see that Cummings' violence to language is indeed organized, and razor-sharp in meaning. Although a first reading does arouse some emotion and provide some clue to meaning, a close observation of grammatical maneuvering allows deeper understanding and appreciation.

Our students would also benefit from examination of one or two paragraphs from a longer literary work. For example, in D. H. Lawrence's short story, "The Blind Man," the second and fourth paragraphs are particularly interesting syntactically in their contrast and in their setting the stage for the events that follow.[2] In presenting the story of Isabel Pervin, the author displays Isabel's moods of joy in the second paragraph, a joy that overcomes her husband's recent blindness, a joy that exists because she and her husband have found happiness in their isolation from the world. However, the fourth paragraph reveals a conflicting emotion during her husband's periods of black depression. This fourth paragraph is one of ambivalence and regression.

From D. H. Lawrence's "The Blind Man," the second and fourth paragraphs:

> He had been home for a year now. He was totally blind. Yet they had been very happy. The Grange was Maurice's own place. The back was a farmstead, and the Wernhams, who occupied the

[1]Robert E. Wegner, *The Poetry and Prose of E. E. Cummings: A Study in Appreciation*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1965), pp. 51-52.

[2]D. H. Lawrence, "The Blind Man," *Prose and Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), pp. 92-93.

rear premises, acted as farmers. Isabel lived with her husband in the handsome rooms in front. She and he had been almost entirely alone together since he was wounded. They talked and sang and read together in a wonderful and unspeakable intimacy. Then she reviewed books for a Scottish newspaper, carrying on her old interest, and he occupied himself a good deal with the farm. Sightless, he could still discuss everything with Wernham, and he could also do a good deal of work about the place—menial work, it is true, but it gave him satisfaction. He milked the cows, carried in the pails, turned the separator, attended to the pigs and horses. Life was still very full and strangely serene for the blind man, peaceful with the almost incomprehensible peace of immediate contact in darkness. With his wife he had a whole world, rich and real and invisible.

But as time wore on, sometimes the rich glamour would leave them. Sometimes after months of this intensity, a sense of burden overcame Isabel, a weariness, a terrible ennui, in that silent house approached between a colonnade of tall-shafted pines. Then she felt she would go mad, for she could not bear it. And sometimes he had devastating fits of depression—which seemed to lay waste to his whole being. It was worse than depression—a black misery, when his own life was a torture to him, and when his presence was unbearable to his wife. The dread went down to the roots of her soul as these black days recurred. In a kind of panic she tried to wrap herself up still further in her husband. She forced the old spontaneous cheerfulness and joy to continue. But the effort it cost her was almost too much. She knew she could not keep it up. She felt she would scream with the strain, and would give anything, anything, to escape. She longed to possess her husband utterly; it gave her inordinate joy to have him entirely to herself. And yet, when again he was gone in a black and massive misery, she could not bear him, she could not bear herself; she wished she could be snatched away off the earth altogether, anything rather than live at this cost.

Although we need to help our students see how semantics naturally plays an important part in creating the different moods of these two paragraphs, we must also have them examine Lawrence's grammatical patterns. In the paragraph of happiness they need to discover how he uses one certain morpheme to create a sense of continuousness or infinity of joy. This morpheme is the conjunction "and," used ten times in this short paragraph, once to coordinate a compound subject, twice for a series of verbs, three times for adjectives, once for adverbs, and three times for independent clauses. Twice Lawrence uses "and" in a series to replace a comma, emphasizing a cataloguing of exuberant emotions that will go on and on and on: "They talked and sang and read together in a wonderful and unspeakable intimacy"; "With his wife he had a whole world, rich and real and invisible." The embedding is done through coordination of kernel sentences, causing a movement forward:

They talked (+S) . . .
They talked (They sang) . . .
They talked and sang (+S)
They talked and sang (They read) . . .
They talked and sang and read . . .

In the paragraph of depression, the students will note that Lawrence uses "and" only twice within the sentences and twice as sentence openers, but these sentence openers do not seem to have the same connotation as the internal usage that implies infinity; therefore, it may not be unreasonable to state that this paragraph has only two "and" conjunctions compared to the previous paragraph's ten. To establish the dark, weary mood of Isabel and Maurice during his tormented days, Lawrence uses different syntactical patterns.

Next, he fills a conjunction slot with a semi-colon twice, both times at the end of the paragraph. Whereas a conjunction would have provided smooth flow of thought and the connotation of

continuation, the semi-colon causes an uneven, halting effect, consistent with the theme of the passage. At this point of examination, students would benefit from juncture markings to contrast the two paragraphs.

But the most interesting change in technique is the kind and amount of embedding. There are more kernel sentences embedded in the fourth paragraph, especially the kind of embedding that doubles back to emphasize, redefine, or modify. In the sentence

> Sometimes, after months of this intensity, a sense of burden overcame Isabel, a weariness, a terrible ennui, in that silent house approached between a colonnade of tall-shafted trees.

the syntactical pattern could be read visually as

> Sometimes,
> after months of this intensity,
> a sense of burden overcame Isabel,
> a weariness,
> a terrible ennui,
> in that silent house approached between
> a colonnade of tall-shafted trees.

Our students need first to determine the basic sentence pattern of this sentence: N^1 V N^2. The first embedment, a transform from the kernel sentence "The months were intense," is "after months of this intensity," reaching back to expand the single word "sometimes." The next important embedment is "a weariness," again a doubling back, to emphasize the idea of burden; this embedment is derived from the kernel sentence "The sense of burden was weariness." "A terrible ennui," derived from "The sense of burden was a terrible ennui," serves the same purpose, but is even more effective since it is not only reaching back to the kernel sentence but also back to "a weariness."

Another example is the sentence

> It was worse than depression—a black misery, when his own life was a torture to him, and when his presence was unbearable to his wife.

The embedment of "a black misery" goes back to clarify and emphasize "depression." The kernel sentences that provide this determiner plus adjective plus noun are "The depression was a misery" and "The misery was black." Next to move backward rather than forward is the adverb transformation of the kernel sentence "His life was a torture" to produce a time element that goes back to clarify the time of the past in the verb "was" in the matrix sentence. The rare use of "and" now seems to move the reader forward at last, but he is immediately taken back to the verb again by another adverbial transformation.

Lawrence, then, consciously or unconsciously, uses the word "and" to move the reader symbolically forward to reflect the joyful emotions involved and to anticipate continuous happiness. But when he wants to establish an opposite mood, he takes the reader forward a few steps and then back one, creating a regressive movement and atmosphere. When the students realize the contrast in syntactical forward movement and reverse movement, these two passages will take on new significance, new meaning in understanding the intensity of the happiness of Isabel and Maurice and the intensity of their anguish. The students then have a sharp awareness of the thin line that separates moments of joy from moments of darkness in the lives of these two people. This awareness sharpens the suspense of Bertie's effect on their lives, as the students are now more sensitive to the least action or even word that can change a forward movement to a regressive one. Thus, the students who analyze linguistics must go from an analysis of style that linguistic units create to an understanding of how an analysis of the style creates meaning.

A linguistic analysis into dialogue also is enlightening for our students, as how

characters say something is almost as important as what they say. Isabel's character, for example, is much clearer when students consider repetitious morphemes. Her speeches, rarely more than one or two sentences at a time, are riddled with the question and negative morphemes and the conjunction "but." Almost every page, almost every speech contains at least one if not all three grammatical units. In her first scene with Maurice, the following sentences illustrate these repetitions: "But what about you, Maurice?" "But I thought you didn't care for him." In her brief conversation with the Wernhams: "No, I won't come in." "Hasn't Mr. Pervin come in, do you know?" "Isn't the trap late?" In the barn with Maurice: "Won't you come in, dear?" "Not yet." "Not yet six." "He won't indeed." In the house: "Maurice, you're not wishing he wouldn't come, are you?" "What are you laughing at?" "Why should I console you?" "What else does anything else matter?" When her old friend Bertie arrives, Isabel's question-negative pattern continues: "Is it you, Bertie?" "Have you come?" "Have you had a miserable drive?" "How are you?" "No —no, not at all." "No, on the contrary, really."

Of approximately 109 sentences, in 54 of them Isabel uses these morphemes that reveal hesitation, indecision, and insecurity. She is already uneasy about her husband's periodic moodiness and about their relationship after their baby arrives. Although she wants to renew her platonic friendship with Bertie, his arrival causes added tension; she is unsure of how to give attention to both men and prevent hostility from deepening.

The speeches of Maurice and Bertie show constant use of the question transform also, revealing basic insecurity in them too. Maurice fears his relationship with his wife will be jeopardized, first by his blindness and now by the presence of a man he dislikes. Probably the fact that he is slow-thinking and unsophisticated adds to his insecurity.

Bertie, the professional, sophisticated city man, is basically as insecure as his host and hostess, as he is afraid to touch life or let it touch him. His dialogue is also permeated with questions. When he first arrives and when he first goes to the barn, his sentences are embedded, mainly with nominalizations, but once life has touched him, he is so emotionally shattered that his speech is reduced immediately, first to incomplete utterances, and finally to no speech at all. He is a shattered man, and his changing syntax reveals the process of destruction.

Once the students have carefully been taken through a linguistic analysis, they will be more aware of the fusion of form and meaning. Although linguistic analysis is not the only aspect of literary criticism, it does offer valuable insights in literature. Moreover, it reinforces the students' understanding of grammar, and they no longer consider grammar as rules to be memorized, put on a shelf, and never used. They begin to see that language is an integral part of their lives, a vital source of communication. And by using this method we are at last teaching with a focus, the logical focus of language, which serves as the base for the tripod of language, composition, and literature. No longer need we teach the aspects of English in separate units. We at last have in our field a seamless garment.